

~~SECRET~~

THE RELEASE OF NORTH KOREAN PRISONERS OF WAR

The unilateral release of the North Korean anti-Communist prisoners by President Rhee has been cited previously as one possible weapon which the South Korean government might be expected to use, short of independent military action, to hamper or block a truce, embarrass the United States, and underline South Korean opposition to an armistice ~~was~~ presently proposed. Other measures noted heretofore, and which may yet be adopted, include South Korea's refusal to sign an armistice, refusal to withdraw ROK troops from the demilitarized zone, withdrawing South Korean troops from the UN Command, and/or employing force against Indian troops.

While the Communists have shown no desire to break off the truce proceedings, this incident presents ~~with~~ ^{them} with this opportunity if they desire to do so. Their line will undoubtedly be that Rhee's action represents collusion with the UN. They stated in mid-May, when the UN proposed that all anti-Communist POWs be immediately released, that such a move would undermine the basis of the talks. This had some logic since, insofar as the talks related to the ~~prisoner issue,~~ ^{prisoner issue,} ~~prisoner issue,~~ the basis of the talks would, in fact, have been undermined. It is more

-2-

likely, however, that the Communists will not end the negotiations ~~on~~ because of ~~the~~ the prisoner release but will, through "righteous indignation," and point up their ability to control their own prisoners, indicate their desire to get on with the proceedings while secretly hoping that conditions will, in fact, cause the agreements to become unworkable.

Rhee's action will undoubtedly cause a drastic lowering of his prestige among friendly UN nations. It should be remembered that the UN's 13 May proposal, calling for the release of anti-Communist POWs immediately, caused violent reactions among many US allies and to a considerable extent brought about revised proposals. Unilateral ROK action in accomplishing the release may cause even more violent reactions. In addition, the US will almost certainly be severely criticized for allowing such a situation to develop in view of the imminent signing of a truce.

An alarming by-product of the affair is that Rhee's orders were apparently carried out by Maj. Gen. Won Yon-tok, chief of the Provost Marshal General Command. Won is a ready tool of Rhee and a political general without military status except for his personal relationship

with Rhee. The affair may undermine the prestige of Chief of Staff Paik Sun-yop, ROK Chief of Staff, whose guards manned the stockades. Paik, ^{who} has consistently opposed Rhee's threatened "march to the Yalu" could now become discredited and be replaced by a "political general" like Won who would not hesitate to order independent military action if Rhee asked for it. While this latest affair ^{probably} ~~simply~~ represents further South Korean attempts ~~at~~ to modify the truce or secure a security pact with the US prior to an armistice, Rhee's emotionalism on the question of unification, coupled with a political general's appointment as chief of staff, might bring the northward march closer to reality than ^{it} ~~has~~ has been heretofore.

*S. H. ...
won not to arrest
any PW's*

DCI Notes
NSC
18 June 53

Soviet Peace Offensive
East Germany Riots
S Korean Release of PWs